

Strafford Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 13, 2021 at 6:00pm via Zoom

Selectboard members participating: Toni Pippy, Pat Kelly, Rett Emerson, Mary Linehan, Brent Cadwell

Others participating: Lisa Bragg, Jon MacKinnon, Dorian Yates, Steve Willbanks, Dorian Yates, Jennifer Brown, Shawn Harlow, Aaron Dotter

Selectboard meeting called to order at 6:01 pm

Public Concerns – none

Emergency Management COVID 19 – See the COVID-19 Vaccine Dashboard for the latest data on vaccination in Vermont and visit healthvermont.gov/covid19-vaccine to learn about who can get vaccinated now, vaccine safety information, and more. Persons who have received the COVID vaccine are reminded that for the safety of the community, masks should continue to be worn and social distancing should be maintained in compliance with VT state and CDC guidelines.

Town Highways and Equipment Update

Jon MacKinnon reported that the highway operations are fine, the new truck has been placed in service. Crew is preparing for an expected snowstorm this weekend.

Highway Correspondence: none

General Correspondence

- Email updates from the State Emergency Operations Center Situation Reports, re: **COVID 19**, Vermont Department of Health. We also receive emails from The Office of the Governor, TRORC and VLTC
- Gus Speth, RE: check out this – Better Places Pilot Program – Agency of Commerce and Community Development. Shared with various agencies in town.
- Susan Cloke, RE: Governor Scott's Flag Policy to Honor Vermonter who have lost their lives due to coronavirus.
- Mark Moran, RE: dog issue and Sunday Night Barking 27-Dec Complaint. Liaison spoke with Sgt. Bariteau and confirmed that a hearing was conducted, and the judge conclude that the occasional barking of dogs does not xx a nuisance. Chair noted that Mr. Moran has demonstrated his cooperation in resolving the issues.
- John Freitag, RE: conservation easements.
- State of Vermont Department of Taxes, RE: 2020 Equalized Study Results for Property Valuation and Review. The Study looks at comparative property values across town to review the accuracy of the Grand List for determining school tax rates. The review indicated that's Strafford is within the acceptable range and will not require reassessment. Aaron

Dotter noted that the common level of appraisal (CLA) rate, which is less than 1 and will result in higher education taxes in the coming year, has been successfully challenged in the past.

- Rocky Fuller RE: Town House budget. THAG submitted notification that the Town Hall budget request for 2021 will remain the same as for 2020. Rocky also sent notice that he will be installing the meter box this week.

Motion passed to approve the minutes of the January 6th special meeting.

Fire Dept Budget. Shawn Harlow presented clarification of the proposed increase in the request for 2021 funding level for the Fire Department. The increase is intended to make sure there is continued upgrading and replacement of necessary fire-fighting gear as required, and purchase of EMT supplies. Fire Dept intends to seek a grant for new radios. Discussion regarding line item expenditures and Fire Dept efforts to keep costs in check, including ambulance charges.

Septic Masonic Lodge. Liaison presented the design plans for the Masonic Lodge sewage disposal system, for which the Town has an easement, and spoke with an engineer, and did not find any problems. Recommended that the town retain the easement in case future plans for the park and ride land. Steve Willbanks reported that an attorney for the Historical Society has indicated there are some irregularities which may need resolution in the property transfer. Jon MacKinnon reported that the line was capped when the Town Garage moved from the site, but the water and sewage lines still exist.

Recreation Board Items follow up. Liaison spoke with insurance agency about skate park, ice-skating and river stair access issues. Agent will come to provide guidance on the river access and skate park. He has greater concerns about insurance for ice-skating on a pond, and the Rec board has indicated it will not pursue ice-skating on a pond this year.

2020 Budget to actual. Likely to have a surplus in the General Fund due to delays in spending resulting from COVID. FEMA COVID expenditures have been reimbursed. Highway funds also likely to a surplus due to delays in implementing activities. Balance forward will be applied to next year to complete planned activities.

2021 Budget. Selectboard is preparing a budget reflecting level funding from 2020 and using balance forward from 2020 to complete activities planned in 2020, but not yet expended. Chair discussed potential budget pressures and threats to revenue based on economic impact of COVID and strategies for maintaining budget balance while planning and reserves for eventual large expenditures (new grader).

Town Meeting, Australian Ballot, Articles. Lisa Bragg and Mary Linehan participated in a VLCT webinar for Town meeting warnings and articles. Reminders were posted for the upcoming deadlines for Town Meeting, especially the Jan 14 deadline for petitions for articles, and the Jan 25 deadline for submission of consent forms for elected officials. Copies of the Overview of the

Australian Ballot Process and Consent Forms are available at the Town Office and Coburn's Store. Future notifications will identify the list of positions open for election in the upcoming ballot:

- Moderator
 - Town Clerk
 - Town Treasurer
 - Selectboard member
 - Selectboard member
 - Lister
 - Auditor
 - School Director
 - School Director
 - Delinquent Tax Collector
 - Trustee of Public Funds
 - Harris Library Trustee
 - Cemetery Commissioner
 - Cemetery Commissioner
 - Agent to Deed Real Estate
- Steve Willbanks requested that the Selectboard include on the Australian Ballot an article allowing a five-year tax exemption for the Strafford Historical Society when they acquire the Mason's building. Historical Society does not yet own the building, and the closing date for property transfer is not yet determined. The Selectboard will consider drafting an article if the property transfer happens prior to the deadline for finalizing the Australian Ballot at the end of January.

Liaison updates

- Junkyard updates— several plans for addressing the identified junkyards have been put forward, to complete the clean up by spring. Only 2 outstanding junkyard owners have failed to provide a plan; responses are due on Jan 16, 2021. Follow up letters will go out if deadline is not met.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Linehan
Reporting Clerk